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PRIORITY THEMES

DEVELOPMENT: WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The Economic and Social Council, in its decision 1990/213, decided to add the issue of women and the environment to the priority theme to be dealt with by the Commission on the Status of Women at its thirty-sixth session under the objective of development. The results of the deliberations on the subject by the Commission at its thirty-sixth session will be provided to the Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development at its fourth session, to be held in New York in 1992. The present report documents the linkages between the status and role of women and the environment. The solution to the environmental crisis is to alleviate the underlying causes of the degradation of natural resources and to achieve equal and sustainable development worldwide. The roles of women, and their knowledge as environmental managers, make their participation in achieving that goal essential. Women in developed and developing regions have been active at the grass-roots level with regard to the environment, and support systems should be developed to assist them in participating, fully and equally, at the decision-making level. It is important to involve women in the planning stages of development programmes and in the allocation of funds, as well as to assist them in their efforts to become representatives at the international level on environmental issues. The participation of women in sustainable development projects should be a prerequisite for the provision of resources, and the impact of such projects on women should be monitored and evaluated in an unbiased manner. The important roles that national machinery and the media play in the global exchange of information are noted.

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INTRODUCTION

1. On the recommendation of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Economic and Social Council adopted decision 1990/213, by which it decided to add the issue of women and the environment to the priority theme to be dealt with by the Commission at its thirty-sixth session under the objective of development, in view of the fact that the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development would be held in 1992. The Preparatory Committee for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development at its third session, held at Geneva from 12 August to 4 September 1991, adopted decision 3/5, entitled "Women in environment and development", in which it requested the Secretary-General, inter alia, to ensure that recommendations from relevant meetings undertaken by non-governmental and intergovernmental organizations and Governments be made available to the Preparatory Committee. The General Assembly, in its resolution 46/167, requested the Commission to make the relevant sections of the report on its thirty-sixth session available to the Preparatory Committee at its fourth session. The General Assembly also requested the Secretary-General to include a section on the role of women in environment and sustainable development in the report on effective mobilization and integration of women in development to the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session.

2. The present report incorporates material from the Global Assembly of Women and the Environment - Partners in Life, held at Miami, Florida, United States of America, from 4 to 8 November 1991 under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and WorldWIDE Network, a non-governmental organization. Summaries of "success stories", successful projects designed and implemented by women in order to find solutions to specific environmental problems, were presented at the Global Assembly. The participants at the Global Assembly, who included representatives of Governments, international and regional organizations, non-governmental organizations, the media, academic institutions, corporations and foundations, together with "new generation leaders", formulated recommendations and "action commitments". The participants also developed regional strategies and action plans for Africa, Asia and the Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and North America. The conclusions and recommendations of the Global Assembly are attached as an annex to the present report.

3. The environment was one of the issues dealt with by the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, held at Nairobi from 15 to 26 July 1985. In the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, adopted by the World Conference, it was recognized that the deprivation of traditional means of livelihood, through environmental degradation resulting from natural and man-made disasters, had forced great numbers of poor women into marginal environments. The Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies also reflected the right of women to have the same opportunity as men to participate in the wage-earning labour force in such programmes as irrigation and tree planting and in other programmes needed to upgrade urban and rural environments. In the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies it was stated that all sources of information dissemination should be mobilized to increase the self-help potential of women in conserving and improving their environment. 1/ On the recommendation of the Commission, the Economic and Social Council, in its resolution 1990/15, adopted the recommendations and conclusions arising from the first review and

appraisal of the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies to the year 2000. Paragraph 20 of those recommendations and conclusions, which are annexed to Economic and Social Council resolution 1990/15, reads as follows:

> "20. The issue of the environment affects the lives of everyone, women and men alike. Women's participation in making decisions on the environment is limited despite the high level of concern women express for the issue and their involvement in it. Women's concern for the environment in all its aspects can be an important force for a general mobilization of women that may have an impact on other areas, including equality and peace.
>
> "Recommendation XVIII. Governments should make efforts to involve individual women and women's groups in making decisions on the environment. Educational programmes should be developed on environmental issues and their relation to daily life.
>
> "The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, to be held in 1992, should consider dealing with the issue of women and the environment with a view, inter alia, to mobilizing women at both the national and international levels and to ensuring that the experience and knowledge of women are fully taken into account."

4. The present report documents the linkages between the status and role of women and their interaction with the environment. Conservation of the environment and natural resources is closely linked to sustainable development. In its report entitled "Our Common Future" (A/42/427, annex), the World Commission on Environment and Development defined sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The common factor that consolidates many actions is women's participation and contribution. As a result of their role in society, women have interacted daily with natural ecosystems and have become skilled and knowledgeable environmental managers. In the present report, examples of women's action in relation to the environment are given and necessary future support and action are identified.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5. The state of the environment is a global problem and should be approached in a unified and cohesive manner. The environmental crisis can only be dealt with by eliminating the underlying basic problems, such as wasteful consumption of natural resources and energy, pollution-producing technologies, poverty, and growth and distribution of population. Armed conflicts also cause extensive environmental degradation and population displacement. The role of women in society makes them significant contributors to efforts to protect the environment, and the improvement of the status of women is vital to the enhancement of their contribution.

6. Globally, women have been active in protecting the environment. In developing countries, women have been successful environmental managers, aware of the importance of biodiversity, of preserving natural resources for future

generations, and of making efficient use of energy; more recognition should be given to the role women play in that area. In developed countries, women have demonstrated their concern by their involvement in, for example, "green" parties; their power as consumers and household managers should be strengthened.

7. Action by women at the grass-roots level has ranged from the protection of natural resources, by efficient household management, to demonstrations against polluting manufacturing methods. Few women, however, have had the opportunities, training or financial means to carry out such action at higher decision-making levels. Women should be able to exercise their right to be involved in decisions regarding the distribution and use of land, the allocation of funds, and project design and implementation; their approaches, views and priorities should be included in policy formulation to ensure a universal approach. In designing development programmes, attention should be given to the level of participation of women and the impact such programmes will have on the status of women.

8. Funding for environmental projects should be decentralized, so that more money is available for use at the local level, and Governments should provide funds for local activities at their inception. In allocating resources, international funding bodies should take into account women's views and priorities, and the impact of the activities involved on the lives and status of women. Criteria for assessing proposals and conditions for support should ensure the representation of women at all levels and in all aspects of decision-making with regard to the planning, implementation and evaluation of the activities involved. Local community involvement, the preservation of cultural traditions, the provision of appropriate technology and the promotion of future self-sufficiency should all be factors to be considered in making decisions on development activities.

9. In order to circumvent their own national laws on environmentally unsound production, many companies have established plants in developing countries. International laws should be formulated and enforced to prevent the exploitation of poor people, the majority of whom are women, as cheap labour and to protect against the dumping of hazardous waste in developing countries.

10. Information on technologies and pollutants should be made universally available. Developing countries have acquired valuable knowledge with regard to environmental conservation, from which developed countries can benefit. Through the exchange of information and cooperation at the international level, measures should be taken to prevent environmental errors made in developed countries that have led to contamination, the dumping of toxic waste, and the wasteful consumption of natural products.

11. Governments implementing the recommendations of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development should ensure that specific attention is paid to the issue of women and the environment. Timetables for the implementation of the recommendations, together with appropriate monitoring mechanisms, should be established. Furthermore, the Commission, in monitoring the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, should pay particular attention to the emphasis being placed on women and the environment in preparing for the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. Governments should ensure that women are proportionally represented in all delegations dealing with environmental matters.

I. WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

12. As the twentieth century draws to a close, a prevailing problem of paramount significance to humanity is the continuity of life on the earth, the preservation of natural resources and the stability of the ecological system in general. The interdependency between all forms of life should be recognized and respected in order to maintain the equilibrium of nature. Global development has not been balanced. There are close linkages between environmental degradation and the issues of poverty, wasteful production, consumption, the rate of population growth, and armed conflict. There is general agreement that those issues need to be dealt with on a priority basis.

13. Women's issues and environmental issues have usually been dealt with separately. Concern for the issues has emerged from two distinctly formed grass-roots movements, each of which has developed a worldwide network of private and governmental organizations. On international agendas the status of women and the state of the environment have been treated as distinct issues although they are relevant and related to all other issues.

14. From the point of view of the environment, sustainable development has emphasized the prevention of pollution and degradation, as well as the containment of economic and environmental costs. From the point of view of gender, making people and their well-being the object of development has required that women be both agents and beneficiaries of the development process. 2/ Globally, women's organizations have promoted environmental awareness, education and management. Women account for a large proportion of the membership of environmental movements and have been among the first to lead protests against chemical, water and air pollution. Strong parallels can be observed between the strategies of environmental and women's groups. Both groups have fought for equal rights and equal opportunities for all people, as well as for future generations. Both have sought to change systems that have exploited natural resources and human resources, particularly women. Both have recognized the dangers of overpopulation to human and natural resources, and women's groups have fought to gain control over their own fertility. Democratization, the decentralization of control, and the participation of all people and diverse cultures have been propounded as means of promoting the rights of women and the environment. Recognition of the various specific values and skills of all groups is fundamental to advancing women and preserving the natural environment. Both women and environmental groups respect the inherent qualities and necessary balance of entire environmental systems and aim at the overall goal of peace. 3/

15. In the Bergen Ministerial Declaration on Sustainable Development in the ECE Region, adopted by the Regional Conference on Action for a Common Future, held at Bergen, Norway, from 14 to 16 May 1990, the major problems facing environmentalists were identified as the destruction of the biosphere and its ecosystems, environmental degradation, population pressures, the depletion of resources and the extinction of species. The Bergen Ministerial Declaration stated that together, those problems threatened the quality of human life and health, as well as many of the earth's biological systems. It also stated that unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, particularly in developed countries, were at the root of numerous global environmental problems. For that reason, in the Bergen Ministerial Declaration, it was recommended that environmental measures should anticipate, prevent and attack the causes of environmental degradation.

16. There is growing recognition of the necessity for the full participation of women at all levels. 4/ The Bergen Ministerial Declaration referred to the role of women in the context of the economics of sustainable development. It stated that projects focusing on human resources, institutions and popular participation, in particular, the potential contributions of local communities, non-governmental agencies and the private sector, should be encouraged and should emphasize the contribution of women.

17. Analysis of women and the environment has led to recognition of women as knowledgeable problem-solvers with an important role to play in the formulation of national and international agendas for sustainable development. Awareness on the part of women of environmental issues that affect their lives and their well-being, the characteristics of their approach, and their sensitivity have been identified as factors important to sustainable development. 5/ Because of inappropriate research and lack of analysis of the underlying causes, women's activities have been viewed as being part of the problem of environmental degradation in the developing world. Having been marginalized by the development process, women have survived by using a knowledge base developed over generations and have become a repository of indigenous knowledge about sustainable resource management. The governmental representative group at the Global Assembly recognized that women played a critical role in the management, use and protection of natural resources and the environment. There is a growing consensus that women, because of their traditional knowledge, skills and experience, should be regarded not as victims of environmental degradation but as assets to environmental management.

18. Approximately 74 per cent of the world's population has been identified as poor people, most of whom live in developing countries. They account for 20 per cent of the resources used each year. Annual per capita consumption in developing countries has been reported to be the equivalent of 0.5 tonne of coal (energy), 43 kilograms of steel and 8 kilograms of paper. By comparison, the remaining 26 per cent of the world's population, mostly people living in developed countries, account for 80 per cent of the resources used each year. Their annual per capita consumption is the equivalent of 5.8 tonnes of coal (energy), 455 kilograms of steel and 123 kilograms of paper. 6/ Wealthier countries that possess the capital and technology to control their pollution account for a greater proportion of the resources used and of the waste created. As a result, it is usually argued that women in developed countries need to act to influence the choice of consumer production, production policies, and the development of technologies that make more efficient use of energy and reduce dependence on non-renewable resources.

19. At the International Conference on an Agenda of Science for Environment and Development into the 21st Century (ASCEND 21), held at Vienna from 24 to 29 November 1991, it was suggested that a significant portion of humankind, especially in developing countries, suffered from poor health owing to a variety of factors associated with poverty. For poor people, struggling for survival can lead to improvident use of land or other natural resources. Poor people are being forced to choose between survival, development and environmental protection. Although the eradication of poverty needs to be a priority objective, the principles of sustainable development should be strictly applied so that the environmental damage that has occurred in and has been caused by developed countries is not repeated in developing countries. The poor tend to be the first to be affected by any overall reduction in the availability of funds and resources, whether the cause is environmental or social in nature or global or local in scope. Poorer people are less able to avoid environmental

risks, and the most disadvantaged among such people tend to be women. Measures to counteract environmental hazards may be unaffordable to low-income households. Lower-cost housing is often available only in areas close to industrial plants and/or in areas where environmental risk is high, where the land is contaminated or polluted and water and sanitation are lacking. Lower-income families may also be restricted in their capacity to change to new, energy-efficient, less-polluting household appliances or vehicles. Global environmental issues, such as ozone depletion, tropical deforestation and climate change, can be of only secondary concern to those suffering from overcrowding, insanitary conditions, toxic wastes and rotting garbage. 7/ As a consequence of their lack of choice, the poor at the microlevel are efficient resource users, savers and recyclers; but even though poor communities have high incentives for managing resources sustainably, they are often unable to do so because of their low status in society. Resources have often been managed by those with insufficient stake in the local environment, and locally available natural resources have often been extracted to benefit other, often wealthier, societies. The linkage between poverty and environmental degradation has led to the identification of ways of protecting the environment, such as improving the status of women and increasing socio-economic development in general.

20. The problem of poverty is compounded by population growth, which is greatest in the poorest countries. Developing countries with populations that double approximately every 20 years have found it difficult, in periods of austerity, to allot sufficient resources for education, health care, infrastructure and other investments for development. Fertility rates and population growth are inversely related to women's educational attainment and economic autonomy; 66 per cent of illiterates are women. 2/ Population increase reflects the need for the poor, particularly the elderly, to rely on large families to provide support. As long as the child mortality rate remains high, the fertility rate will also remain high. To reduce the fertility rate, it is essential for women to receive the necessary education, information and power to make informed decisions about their fertility. At ASCEND 21, it was concluded that primary health care, adequate nutrition and an improved environment were needed in order for long-term solutions to reduce morbidity. Rapid population growth, together with population distribution patterns and the trend towards urbanization, produces critical constraints on the development process and an untenable burden on environmental resources. In addition, it overwhelms the capacities of Governments to plan for fast-growing communities. 8/

21. The majority of the poor reside in rural areas 9/ and most rural women are directly dependent on their immediate environment and on their own skilfulness in using it to fulfil their daily needs. They are, by necessity, efficient and effective day-to-day managers. Women are direct consumers of basic natural resources in most developing countries because they are the primary providers of water, food and fuel for cooking and heating in their households. Whereas indoor water, sanitation, electricity and heating are taken for granted in most developed countries, studies in Africa and Asia indicate that women and girls spend on average 5-17 hours per week collecting and carrying water and up to 7.5 hours per week collecting fuel. 4/

22. Women play a major role in the forestry sector throughout the developing world. Involving women in forestry projects can make the difference between achieving or not achieving project objectives. 3/ Moreover, involving women need not be costly and almost always produces a higher return on project investment. As a result of their traditional reliance on forestry resources,

women are often the chief repositories of knowledge concerning the use and management of trees and other forest plants. Women are often the main collectors and users in forestry and agricultural projects, where they make use of their traditional knowledge of plant fibres, medicinal plants and herbs, fruits and nuts, industrially important oils, and resins. In many countries and environments non-wood forest products are a major source of income for the local population.

23. Until recently, however, reports of the involvement of women in the forestry crises in developing countries have been incomplete and biased. Although women provide a considerable portion of the labour, especially in certain forest industries (e.g. nursery work, tree planting, logging and wood processing), their wages and status are not equal to those of men and their working conditions are not adequate. Many planners have equated forest degradation with fuel and fodder collection and with images of women walking ever further in search of fuelwood. Household fuel and fodder shortages are only one consequence of forest degradation that affects women. A great problem faced by rural women, aggravated by women's inferior status, is the reduction in the area available for subsistence farming owing to the use of land and natural resources for cash crops to service the external debt.

24. As noted in paragraph 19 above, mechanisms for survival are not the issue in developed countries. Wasteful production and overconsumption have created environmental problems in those countries. The environmental movement (often reflected in "green" parties) has demonstrated links between consumerism and conservation of the environment. 10/ Women have recognized the strength of their role as consumers and the extent to which they can influence the manufacture of products that have a detrimental effect on the environment. It has been argued that women should use the power to influence as a foundation to improve their status and to participate more at the higher levels of decision-making. In developed countries, the private short-term gains that characterize economic growth present a great threat to the environment. In addition to wasteful methods of producing materials to satisfy consumer demand in developed countries, there is also the issue of disposal of waste products. There has been insufficient legal control over the "dumping" of excess toxic waste in developing countries. Many recipient countries have large external debts and therefore, for economic reasons, have had to give secondary importance to environmental considerations.

II. ACTION BY WOMEN FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

25. The serious climatic changes and environmental degradation, resulting from industrial development, deforestation, inappropriate land use, and air and water pollution, affect both women and men worldwide. Women have shown particular interest in and concern about the state of the environment by taking action such as mass demonstrations against energy projects detrimental to the environment, by lobbying for cleaner production methods and for the introduction of environmentally sound land and crop management programmes and by physically protecting their immediate environment. On the whole, action by women has been limited to grass-roots activities, and rarely have women been in positions where they could influence policy decisions on environmental management or the distribution of funds. In general, women's participation in public life has tended to be at the local level, where their activities in response to threats to the environment have been directed against specific problems affecting the community. Women fit the additional activities into

their everyday schedules. They also rely on personal contacts and networks rather than on established institutions.

26. Conservation of the environment is a fundamental necessity for sustainable development. At the Global Assembly 218 success stories were presented. They had been chosen for being "repeatable, affordable, sustainable and visible". The success stories related to the environmental issues of water, waste, energy and environmentally friendly technology. Few of the success stories had taken place in developed countries; of those that had, the majority were concerned with how to deal with the waste products of consumerism.

27. In developing countries, rapid and concentrated growth in urban areas has created major environmental problems, particularly in the informally developed settlements that surround most cities. Government agencies have been increasingly unable to provide sufficient infrastructure and services to meet the need for clean water, proper sanitation, solid waste collection, and drainage. The result has been contaminated water supplies, open cesspools and uncontrolled garbage disposal. The cost to the environment and to people's health has been high. 11/

28. There are many examples of women's groups taking action at the local level to deal with waste. In the Philippines, the Metro Manila Council of Women Balikatan Movement, Incorporated, a non-governmental organization with a membership of 20,000 women, has developed activities for recycling garbage, tree planting, promoting culinary and medical uses of herbal plants and promoting the use of solar box cookers (to reduce national imports of crude oil). It has also participated in campaigns to ban leaded petrol and to modify motor vehicles to enable them to use unleaded petrol. For more than seven years, the Council has been recycling dry household waste back to factories. Every household has been encouraged to separate its waste into dry waste (paper products, plastics, bottles and caps) and wet waste (food and animal waste). Regular collection and purchase of the dry waste have resulted in clean streets and increased prosperity for household owners and collectors and in reduced fuel consumption for factories.

29. In Mali, unemployment was an acute problem for university graduates, particularly women. Another problem involved waste disposal and the lack of sanitation in cities. To deal with both problems, a project was initiated by the National Union of Mali Women (UNFM) and Promotion of the Role of Women in Water and Environmental Sanitation (POWWESS), with funding from the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Development Fund for Women. The project was aimed at improving the socio-economic situation and health of women and their families, integrating women's participation in the development process, training young women graduates to manage a small sanitation enterprise and assisting in the education of poor women. The project was successful in areas such as employment generation, management training, sanitation and environmental health promotion, and practical environmental activities and awareness-raising. 3/ In the settlement of Alladjan in Côte d'Ivoire, inadequate garbage collection in a densely populated area resulted in garbage being dumped into the ocean, contaminating the beach. Training women to provide health and sanitation education to the community is helping improve the situation. 11/

30. In Greece, tourism accounts for a considerable proportion of the national income. In the last few decades, however, tourism has contributed to the destruction of the environment and of traditions and customs. Rural women in

many villages, especially villages on islands, have always worked in the tourist sector, but usually as low-paid or unpaid domestic workers. In many small or family enterprises, such as taverns, restaurants and hotels, it was invariably the men who dealt with the tourists and controlled the income while the women provided the labour by preparing food and cleaning. In 1983, the National Council of Equality, the first governmental body established in Greece to promote the advancement of Greek women, decided to initiate a project that would help rural women become organized in a cooperative, instead of staying at the margin of income-generating activities.

31. Petra on the Greek island of Lésvos was chosen for the project. Women members of the cooperative were trained to deal with the specific problems they faced, such as economic subordination and illiteracy. As a result of the project, the cooperative members received good incomes and became self-confident, more socialized, more educated and more politically aware. The local environment was developed and preserved, particularly with regard to employment opportunities. Furthermore, the project provided needed tourist accommodations and the area was revitalized so that foodstuffs grown in traditional, natural ways could be supplied. The area was maintained by the local authorities, and traditions and customs were preserved or regenerated because of their interest and economic value. The women members of the cooperative gained experience as managers and, as such, were able to compete with men. The women members also became familiar with technical and economic procedures of the cooperative. The success of the project has been widely acknowledged and the women, having become more politically aware and confident, have assisted other areas in establishing similar projects. 3/

32. In 1989, women in Democratic Yemen* were responsible for many farming activities, including all aspects of animal husbandry, as well as household tasks, the fetching of water and the collection of wood or other fuel resources. Apart from the time spent and the workload, the smoke, contaminated water and work with dung had adverse effects on women's health. The population in general was poor and the illiteracy rate was high; health services were poor and deforestation and overgrazing had caused serious ecological problems. The success of two projects involving biogas technology, implemented by the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, encouraged the Government of Democratic Yemen to choose the village of El-Habael as the site for a two-year pilot project, funded by the United Nations Development Fund for Women. The General Union of Yemeni Women acted as collaborating agency. The village women were directly involved in the maintenance and management of the biogas technology systems, as well as in the village committee. The project involved 40-50 women and their families. The objectives were to improve the quality of life of the women and their families by introducing biogas technology and income-saving and income-generating activities, to assess the social, environmental and health impacts of biogas technology, and to minimize health hazards and water pollution. The activities included the construction of 22 family and community biogas units, including public and private latrines, animal sheds and gas stoves; training; the formation of a group of women village leaders to assist extension workers in implementing programmes for health, literacy, nutrition, child care, and home-based

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*On 22 May 1990 the Yemen Arab Republic and the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen merged to form a single sovereign State called the Republic of Yemen.

economic activities; the participation of women in village committees; the installation of water-treatment units in houses; and the planting of vegetable gardens.

33. The project relieved women of many onerous tasks, such as the collection of wood and agricultural residues; greatly reduced their exposure to the by-products of burning organic materials and, in turn, to health hazards; and improved the sanitary and health conditions of households, as well as the environmental conditions of the village. Moreover, the village was provided with an inexpensive energy source that met 70-80 per cent of the household energy requirements, the nutritional standards of the village improved, and air and water pollution decreased. Reducing environmental stress on the land and vegetation enabled regeneration to take place.

III. ACTION TO SUPPORT WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT

34. Since the convening of the World Conference on Women at Nairobi in 1985, strong emphasis has been placed on the sustainability of global economic and social development. As was noted by the Meeting of Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs, held at Ottawa, Canada, from 9 to 12 October 1990, the goals of development for women and of sustainable development usually coincide, and progress on both issues would be faster if Governments, international agencies, non-governmental organizations and local communities would all recognize that fact. 12/ Women themselves have become more aware that they have a particular contribution and perspective to offer. With the International Development Strategy for the Fourth United Nations Development Decade (see General Assembly resolution 45/198, annex), the contributions, role, awareness and activities of women in relation to global survival have been recognized. As noted in a study prepared for the Canadian International Development Agency, poverty and natural resource degradation in the developing world are, to some extent, the result of global and regional policies that have emphasized profits, technology and interests detrimental to sustainability, resource conservation and women's well-being. 5/

35. In recent years, there has been an increase in the awareness and acknowledgement of women's traditional values, such as their struggle for equality, their activities against domination and exploitation, their non-violent behaviour, and their management of the environment to provide basic necessities (food, clean water etc.) rather than exploiting it for profit. Recognition of those values as a necessity for sustainable development in the 1990s will be the key to women's accelerated participation in the development process.

A. Participation in decision-making

36. There is still a low proportion of women at the top levels of decision-making in general and that is also true for environmental issues. Women's role in the microlevel management of environment and development makes it essential for them to be at all levels of decision-making and decision makers should take note of their contribution. States parties to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (see General Assembly resolution 34/180, annex) are obligated under articles 7 and 8 of the Convention to take measures to enable women to participate politically and internationally. As UNEP has noted, for women to participate fully at the decision-making level, there needs to be substantial improvement in support

measures (such as family planning, child-care facilities, and sharing of family responsibilities). 13/ Another significant factor inhibiting women from participating in public life is the time they spend on household duties and responsibilities. Increased female participation in the management of the environment would require parallel action to change the present sexual division of labour, thereby removing that obstacle to positive participation by women in the public sector.

37. Groups or associations offer a larger pool of resources, break down the isolation of women and provide collective strength to achieve common objectives. Women's groups, formed in response to developmental or environmental problems, have resulted in the building of strong alliances between the individuals and a sharing of knowledge and awareness that have led them to take other action, such as action to ensure the rights of women. Such diversification of activities results from women's ability to balance demands on their time, and it has been recognized that women are more able than men to achieve practical solutions and compromises when dealing with problems. More details are given on the participation of women in decision-making in the report of the Secretary-General entitled "Peace: equal participation in all efforts to promote international cooperation, peace and disarmament" (E/CN.6/1992/10).

38. Women's action groups established to protect their immediate environment have often resulted in women becoming more politically conscious. Such groups have often led to an improvement in the status and living standards of the women involved, as a result of the development of environmentally sound income-generating projects. In general, the emergence of "green" parties and their effect on governmental decisions has been noticeable and media coverage of "green" activities has greatly increased in recent years. In Germany, women leaders played a key role in the emergence of the Green Party, 50 per cent of whose members are women.

39. The progression from community success to national or regional activity is difficult for women who have traditionally not received the appropriate education and training and whose rights are not equal to men's with regard to opportunities, land use, land ownership, access to credit, and workload.

40. Women have benefited from environmental action by dealing with immediate problems (deforestation and desertification and reclaiming wasteland, conserving the soil and water resources) and by learning new skills and generating income (cultivating vegetables, seedlings, medicinal plants and herbs); and they have increased their self-confidence, independence and status. The wider benefits of the increase in women's income and status have been improved maternal and child health, reduced family size and, in turn, a reduced burden on national economies. The Women and Natural Resource Management Programme of the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), for example, has explored the many practical strategies that women have developed, at the grass-roots level, to rehabilitate, conserve and manage natural resources.

41. Empowering women to deploy their skills and experience should become a major policy goal. In both the North and the South, women have been increasingly effective in alerting Governments, businesses and consumers to environmental problems, acting to reduce hazards and to restore and care for natural resources. Women and their networks are a powerful lobby for improved action. Women have shown that they are an essential part of the "green" wave and are in a strong position to effect change as conscientious environmental citizens

and local leaders. As one author has noted, women have made a significant contribution by being environmentally responsible consumers and educators. They should lobby for policies that respect the environment and that do not threaten their hard-won equality gains. 14/

B. Policy adjustments

42. In addition to the increase in women's participation, it is essential to improve the awareness of and response to women's concerns and needs in all decision-making bodies. As was noted by the Meeting of Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Women's Affairs, within environmental and developmental programmes it is essential to set priorities to include an assessment of the impact on the status of women. 12/ Analysis on women and the environment suggests that women are better resource managers than men not because they are women but because they have a knowledge base and an outlook that are critical to the promotion of secure livelihoods in the developing world. As noted in the Canadian International Development Agency study, the different priorities and approaches of women are necessary to retain a balanced viewpoint at the decision-making level on all issues. 5/ Women's environmental interests should permeate strategic policies on other issues, such as structural adjustment and the improvement of women's status, including access to land, credit, technology, employment opportunities and training. Governments, aid agencies and local communities should recognize the fact that women are central figures in environmental management. Women need positive action to enhance their role as resource managers.

43. To respond to the environmental crisis, in general there is growing consensus that priorities need to be changed in the formulation of policies, procedures and projects, particularly within Governments, bilateral and multilateral development agencies, and non-governmental organizations. Initiatives for sustainable development that conserve the natural resource base for economic and social advancement should be actively promoted by taking specific measures to permit women to participate as effective resource managers and to benefit from their input.

44. More effective family planning would result in significant environmental benefits. Women play an important role as environmental educators. By teaching children awareness and care of the environment, changes in behaviour could be stimulated that might lead to improved patterns of food, water and energy consumption. 13/ Population policies should be formulated principally by women, who possess an integrated overview of social and gender problems. Family planning should take into account socio-economic, cultural, linguistic and educational variables to permit women to make informed decisions with regard to child-bearing.

45. Women's child-bearing capacity makes them more physiologically sensitive to environmental pollutants than men. Programmes aimed at protecting the environment have often ignored women's interests and their exposure to pollution. Women are also exposed to other health threats while carrying out their daily responsibilities, such as smoke emitted from burning fuelwood, charcoal, crop residues or dung, which may cause serious eye or respiratory diseases, 4/ or exposed to toxic chemicals at the workplace or in the home. Birth defects resulting from chemical or nuclear effects on their wombs and milk constitute another health factor sensitizing women to the cleanliness of their local environment. Many women's groups have emerged in the battle against contaminants resulting from toxic waste and nuclear power production. The League of

Women Voters in the United States of America was one of the pioneers of national action against water pollution. Policies to control the production and use of toxic substances need to take into consideration the situation of women.

C. Development cooperation and the use of funds for the environment

46. Community action groups have traditionally operated on a voluntary basis. Participants usually lack information on the appropriate procedures for obtaining grants and resource assistance from national or international sources. Decisions on funding allocation should be decentralized so that local conditions and priorities can be accommodated.

47. In developing countries, the relationship between women and the environment has been affected by the deteriorating economic conditions faced by most. Foremost among those conditions are low rates of economic growth, high international interest rates and unsustainable debt-service burdens, declining or unfavourable terms of trade, and structural adjustment responses that have resulted in more export-led cash-crop production at the expense of food security and in reductions in spending on health, education, training and other services upon which women depend. Studies have clearly shown that cash-crop production and forest exploitation penalize women by resulting in higher prices for food and energy, forcing them to move away from conservation practices. For example, higher prices for imported fossil fuel make it difficult, if not impossible, for households to stop using wood as fuel.

48. Many development projects exploit raw materials or produce cash crops for export, without giving adequate consideration to the long-term effects on local natural resources and the people who depend on them. Women and their families have been deeply affected by projects that have depleted the resource bases on which many of their productive activities (such as subsistence agriculture and food processing) depend. Since markets are dependent on demand, action has focused on reducing the demand for products that deplete natural resources rather than on making adjustments at the resource base.

49. Sixty per cent of the world's remaining tropical forests are located in Brazil, Colombia, Indonesia, Peru and Zaire, all developing countries that are deeply in debt. In the absence of other resources, the pressure on those countries to use the forests to repay their debts is high. Once tropical forest land is cleared, it quickly becomes poor and fragile; the soil soon becomes exhausted and eroded as a result of the loss of forest cover, perpetuating the cycle of deepening poverty and greater environmental destruction. This is one reason why it has been argued that the environmental crisis cannot be solved without solutions to the poverty and debt crises in those countries. 6/

50. There is worldwide consensus on the need to improve the external economic situation, especially international debt, trade and resource flows. Donor aid agencies can reinforce action for sustainable development and for the development of women by linking aid, in the form of projects, to the level of participation of women and to improvement in their status. There is a need for more field projects that link women's issues with environmental issues, whereby opportunities are identified for women to generate income and establish new enterprises by careful resource management. In project implementation, the provision of modern, time-saving technologies should be available to women and men on an equal basis.

51. Foundations, because of their independence and financial capabilities, are in a position to provide incentives and to direct policy and programming. The foundation group at the Global Assembly encouraged foundations to insist on women's participation in environmental management. Also, conditions of support and criteria for assessing proposals should include the priorities of women; the representation of women at all levels and in all aspects of decision-making and policy and programme planning, implementation and evaluation; local community involvement; the preservation of cultural traditions; and the provision of appropriate technology for self-sufficiency.

52. In view of their role in exploiting resources and in transferring technology, transnational corporations should be made aware of their responsibilities towards the status of women and the environment and of the consequences of the way in which they use labour and natural resources, and they should take measures to clean up damage from past harmful production. The country of origin of any given corporation, and the corporation itself, should accept legal responsibility for controlling production methods at an environmentally acceptable level. Women should be members of boards of directors and top managers of corporations, thereby bringing the women's perspective to corporate environmental responsibility.

D. Information and sharing knowledge

53. It has been acknowledged that developed countries can learn from developing countries about environmental management at the microlevel. Information should be universally accessible, i.e. exchanged at the local, national, regional and international levels. The power of information networks and of the media to disseminate information on development issues and on the rights of women has been recognized for many years. The vital role of non-governmental organizations and national machinery in disseminating information is widely acknowledged. Public information and training videos on women and the environment, such as those being developed by the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women, provide useful tools for disseminating information; their further development should be encouraged.

54. The Bergen Ministerial Declaration emphasized awareness-raising and public participation. It stated that participation should be by a well-informed and well-educated society in order to enable the public to mobilize itself to effect political change consistent with sustainable development. The Bergen Ministerial Declaration advocated the promotion of environmental education, including non-formal education, for people of all ages and in all sectors of society. By adopting the Bergen Ministerial Declaration, the 34 ministers attending the Regional Conference on Action for a Common Future reaffirmed the special role of women in promoting sustainable development, as well as the need to improve their economic and educational opportunities, especially in developing countries. Globally, there should be open access to information on the environment in order to increase public participation in procedures to control pollution and prevent environmental damage. The Regional Conference developed a Joint Agenda for Action, in which awareness-raising and participation by all sectors of society in implementing policies for sustainable development were considered vitally important. The Joint Agenda advocated, inter alia, periodic surveys monitoring public knowledge about and attitudes towards the environment, as well as the establishment of a network of resource centres and data banks, such as the European Environmental Agency.

55. Gender analysis has not been applied to the collection of data on the use of natural resources or on the environment. Data are usually collected by

researchers who are not sensitive to women's issues; consequently the data are biased, as illustrated by the failure of many researchers to reflect women's work, household responsibilities and time use. There is a pressing need for new research on women's knowledge of their environments and for new policy initiatives to integrate into the project cycle women's knowledge and goals with respect to the use of natural resources. Publications by United Nations specialized agencies and particularly by the Statistical Office of the Secretariat should include, where available, statistics that demonstrate women's role as environmental managers.

56. The United Nations Research Institute for Social Development plans to carry out research on the way specific groups of women with low incomes are affected by and react to environmental degradation. It also plans to study adjustments made in household survival strategies in response to environmental stress, particularly the impact of those adjustments on demographic variables such as fertility, morbidity and mortality, as well as migration. 15/

57. As a response to the urgent need for action, the self-help potential of women in conserving and protecting the environment may be enhanced by mobilizing sources of information and by improving access to environmental education. The first review and appraisal of the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies, conducted by the Commission at its thirty-fourth session, encouraged the development of educational programmes on environmental issues and the relation of such issues to daily life. Lifelong environmental education is the responsibility of all. Programmes for disseminating information, literacy campaigns for women (especially regarding family planning) and programmes for raising people's awareness of women's rights need to be improved and expanded.

58. As one seminar concluded, women's self-empowerment can be supported by education and training programmes, at home and abroad, which give women the economic and political expertise to shape and manage national and international development plans. 5/ Education, both formal and non-formal, needs to include awareness-raising, respect for nature and gender equality, and advancement of women. Scholarships should be available specifically for women in areas related to science and environmental studies, and women should have equal access to new technologies. As recommended by the Arab Women's Assembly on the Role of Arab Women in the Protection of the Environment, held at Tunis from 6 to 10 February 1990, special attention should be given to rural women's education and training to enable them to improve traditional methods of food production and preservation.

Notes

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Annex

WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON THE ENVIRONMENT: SELECTED CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GLOBAL ASSEMBLY OF WOMEN AND THE ENVIRONMENT - PARTNERS IN LIFE (Miami, 4-8 November 1991)

1. The Global Assembly of Women and the Environment met at Miami, Florida, United States of America, from 4 to 8 November 1991 to deal with the global issues of water, waste, energy and environmentally friendly systems. During the Global Assembly, 218 successful grass-roots projects concerned with those issues were presented by women from all regions of the world. The Global Assembly also had before it the conclusions of regional assemblies held in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific, and the West Asian and Arab region.

2. The success stories presented evidence that women, based on their experience, roles and skills, had specific and valuable contributions to make on issues related to the environment that were being dealt with by Governments and United Nations entities and that would be dealt with by the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, to be held at Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, from 1 to 12 June 1992. The success stories also demonstrated that the global resolution of environmental issues and the advancement of environmental management required the involvement of women.

3. The conclusions and recommendations presented below should be brought to the attention of the Preparatory Committee of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development at its fourth session, to be held in New York in 1992, the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Bank and other international financing organizations. The conclusions and recommendations should also be widely communicated to institutions and people by the mass media.

I. ROLE OF WOMEN IN THE ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Conclusions

4. The Global Assembly concluded that women's role in environment management for sustainable development had taken place at the grass-roots level and that their concern for the environment had been motivated by their desire to improve the quality of life and natural systems. Women recognized that the eradication of poverty was central to solving problems of the environment. They understood that wasteful consumption contributed to environmental degradation. They recognized that peace was essential to an ecologically sound environment.

5. Women's experiences, perspectives and concerns had not been taken into account in development generally or in most programmes dealing with the protection of the environment and human and natural resources. Women's full participation in environmental management was essential to the achievement of sustainable development.

6. Too few women had been involved in decision-making with regard to policies, programmes, projects or funding for the environment, despite the target of

increasing the proportion of women in leadership positions to at least 30 per cent by 1995, with a view to achieving equal representation between women and men by the year 2000, in accordance with recommendation VI of the recommendations and conclusions emanating from the first review and appraisal of the implementation of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women to the year 2000 (see Economic and Social Council resolution 1990/15, annex).

7. In its decision 3/5, the Preparatory Committee of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development at its third session requested the Secretary-General to establish mechanisms to include a global goal in Agenda 21 promoting the effective participation of women in knowledge generation, decision-making and management at the local, national, regional and international levels.

Recommendations

8. Successful projects at the grass-roots level should lead to more concerted policies and action at the national level. Mechanisms should be established to incorporate the experience, talents and contribution of women into national policies and programmes.

9. Governments and national, regional and international organizations should appoint women to positions at all levels. Women should occupy a significant proportion of the senior positions on panels, boards, parliamentary committees, ministries and public agencies, as well as on delegations to United Nations conferences, including the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development and any organizations established for its follow-up.

10. Candidates for all public offices should be assessed in terms of their position on environmental issues. Women should exercise their democratic rights and responsibilities to elect leaders, especially women, who are responsive to women's needs and concerns with respect to the environment and development.

11. Non-governmental organizations should publicize the positions of candidates for public office, in terms of their consistency with their concerns with respect to women and the environment, and should monitor the progress made by Governments in appointing women to decision-making positions concerned with the environment and in taking decisions that reflect women's perspectives.

12. Environmental non-governmental organizations should significantly increase the number of women serving in top-level positions in their organizations.

13. Women should be party to the allocation of funds and resources from national authorities or international lending agencies.

14. The needs and views of women should be incorporated into the establishment of priorities in the management of human and natural resources. Women should also be involved in setting those priorities.

15. National and international funding sources for environmental projects should establish procedures for including and consulting women prior to designing a project or making an investment.

16. Appropriate research to identify the potential impact of environmental and development projects on people's lives should be made available to both public and private institutions, including academic institutions.

Conclusions

17. The success stories brought to the attention of the Global Assembly, which involved women's projects aimed at finding solutions to specific environmental problems, demonstrated the capacity of women at the local level to implement projects that benefited both themselves and their immediate environment. The Global Assembly concluded that policies concerning the environment that did not involve women would not succeed in the longer run.

18. The successful women's projects brought to the attention of the Global Assembly, though initiated with local resources, demonstrated how external funding, particularly development assistance, could help sustain such projects in their early stages and could serve to attract additional national funding. The value of investing in women-led projects and increasing the scope of such projects was clearly demonstrated.

Recommendations

19. Governments should design policies for environmental management that delegate maximum authority and action to the local level. Adequate public resources should be made available to local governmental and non-governmental initiatives.

20. A grants programme should be established to support women in environmental management at the local level.

21. Development assistance in support of women's grass-roots efforts to protect the environment and to achieve sustainable development should be substantially increased. A significant share of aid portfolios should be earmarked for those efforts. In addition, women should be provided with resources to monitor, evaluate and exchange experiences in project implementation.

22. International development assistance organizations should improve coordination among programmes dealing with the environment, the advancement of women and development policies.

II. ENERGY

Conclusions

23. The Global Assembly concluded that energy consumption would define the environment of the future. Women had power as consumers to determine future energy systems. The availability of adequate energy supplies benefited women in their traditional tasks and gave them time to engage in activities that were more productive and educational. Conservation of energy started in the household and was often related to tasks predominantly performed by women. The success stories involving women's projects showed that women had developed new approaches to environmentally sound energy production in rural areas and conservation of energy. That experience should be taken into account in designing environmentally sound energy policies.

Recommendations

24. Governments should evaluate energy policies in terms of total energy systems, including the micro-systems managed by women in the home, as well as

the role of women as consumers, and should take into account women's views and preferences.

25. Priority should be given to reducing dependence on the use of fossil fuels, particularly in view of the contribution of such fuels to global atmospheric change, as nuclear power and its associated wastes pose a greater threat to the survival of the earth.

III. WATER

Conclusions

26. The Global Assembly concluded that the availability of water of good quality was an essential human need that was not being adequately met. The provision of water was essential to human settlements and required cost-effective solutions. It was important to ensure the provision of safe water to all.

Recommendations

27. In allocating and protecting water supplies, Governments should give the highest priority to the needs of people. Technologies that are inexpensive, universally accessible and easy to install and maintain should be developed and disseminated. Designers of all water supply and sanitation systems should be required to consult women, who are the primary users in the home.

IV. WASTE

Conclusions

28. The Global Assembly concluded that waste was a lost resource, dangerous to ecosystems and to health. The success stories involving women's projects showed that women had found ways to deal with waste economically and safely, either by recycling or by adopting responsible consumer behaviour patterns. They also showed that uncontrolled dumping of toxic wastes, at the national and international levels, could be resisted and stopped. Waste should be reduced by developing cleaner production technologies.

Recommendations

29. Recycling and environmentally sound waste management should be institutionalized by national policies and local programmes. Disposal of toxic wastes should be strictly regulated everywhere.

V. ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY SYSTEMS

Conclusions

30. It was concluded that new, cost-effective, environmentally friendly systems and the reintroduction of effective indigenous methods could reduce waste production and could protect natural resources. Women consumers were a powerful force behind the research and development of such technologies, as demonstrated by the success stories involving women's projects.

Recommendations

31. Women should use their rights as consumers to influence Governments and the private sector in the development of appropriate technology. Women should also endeavour to take environmentally friendly decisions and actions in their daily lives, in their homes, in their places of work and in their local communities.

32. Governments should provide for the protection and careful administration of the natural resources and inherited property of communities, in particular those identified as crucial at the local and global levels, such as genetic resources.